

The Times They Are a-Changin'

When Bob Dylan penned those words in 1963 he had no idea how relevant those words would still be today in 2013. Those words appropriately describe the changing landscape of the veterinary profession. Prescribing practices and dispensing prescription veterinary drugs to your patients has changed dramatically from the traditional prescriber/dispenser model used in veterinary medicine. Today, many animal owners demand competitive pricing on the medications that they give to their animals. Animal owners search out prices and options on how to obtain the prescribed or recommended medications. Many animal owners want a choice and expect that the prescribing process will be the same as when their doctor prescribes a medication. With this change in animal prescribing and dispensing practices come additional responsibilities for the veterinarian, the pharmacist and acknowledgement of a paradigm shift.

At times, disagreements and conflict develop between the veterinarian and the animal owner when an animal owner requests a prescription for an animal medication. In Minnesota there is no specific legal obligation that the veterinarian provide a prescription to an animal owner, even when there is a valid Veterinarian-Client-Patient-Relationship (VCPR) and the medication is medically indicated. Other factors can complicate a prescription request denial by a veterinarian. The **Principles of Veterinary Medical Ethics of the AVMA** clearly state that *"Veterinarians should honor a client's request for a prescription in lieu of dispensing"*. Therein lies the rub. Additionally, if a veterinarian refuses to provide an animal owner a prescription for medication when a valid VCPR exists and the prescription is medically appropriate, depending on the specific circumstances, this might be considered grounds for disciplinary action in the Veterinary Practice Act.

When a veterinarian provides a prescription to an animal owner, the following information must be included in the prescription as required in MN Statute §156.18 Subdivision 1 (d) :

(d) A prescription or other veterinary authorization must include:

- (1) the name, address, and, if written, the signature of the prescriber;
- (2) the name and address of the client;
- (3) identification of the species for which the drug is prescribed or ordered;
- (4) the name, strength, and quantity of the drug;
- (5) the date of issue;
- (6) directions for use;
- (7) withdrawal time;
- (8) expiration date of prescription; and
- (9) number of authorized refills.

When veterinarians are writing prescriptions they should be aware that some symbols, terms and abbreviations that are used and accepted in veterinary medicine are not part of the pharmacy vernacular. For instance, S.I.D is sometimes used in veterinary medicine to mean “once a day”. The accepted and standardized pharmacy term that should be used is q.d., which means “every day”. Another pharmacy term that veterinarians should know is D.A.W., which means “dispense as written”. If a prescription includes D.A.W., the pharmacist MUST dispense the medication that was specifically identified on the prescription. There can be no substitutions or generic medications used. Documents that have appropriate prescription writing terms and abbreviations along with documents that list prohibited pharmacy terms and terms that should be avoided are posted on the MVMA website. Although oral or telephone prescriptions to a pharmacist are legal, the written prescription provides a paper trail and appropriate documentation should problems occur.

When pharmacies are expanding the types of medications that they dispense from only human medications to dispensing animal medications, the pharmacists have the same responsibility to provide competent and informative pharmacy services. The pharmacist should be able to identify possible drug interactions, inappropriate dosages and inappropriate medications. The pharmacist should contact the prescriber to get clarification and counsel the animal owner on such matters. If you or your client identify inaccurate or inappropriate dispensing practices by a pharmacist, the situation should be brought to the attention of the Minnesota Board of Pharmacy.

If you have additional questions you may contact the Minnesota Board of Veterinary Medicine or the Minnesota Board of Pharmacy.